

IN THE CLAIMS:

Claim 1 (currently amended). A connector for use in isolating painted tubular metal balusters from rails formed of wood treated with a wood preservative that is corrosive to the tubular metal balusters or from a wood preservative that is corrosive to the paint, said connector formed of a chemically inert material and comprising a body and a flat disk,

said body having an upper ~~frustum~~ member having a frustoconical shape with a top and a base and a lower ~~frustum~~ member having a frustoconical shape with a top and a base, said upper and lower ~~frustums~~ members joined at their bases, said body adapted to conform and wedge into an end of a tubular metal baluster; and,

said flat disk adapted for placement under the lower ~~frustum~~ member and against an end of the tubular metal baluster when the body is wedged into the end of tubular metal baluster,

said upper ~~frustum~~ member having a central cavity for receipt of a fastener for joining the body and the disk to a wooden rail, said disk acting as a corrosion barrier between the baluster and the wood rail.

Claim 2 (currently amended). The connector of claim 1 wherein a central ridge is formed about the body where the ~~frustums~~ members are joined, said body adapted to wedge into an end of a tubular metal baluster on at least the central ridge.

Claim 3 (currently amended). The connector of claim 2 wherein one or more additional ridges are formed on the upper and lower ~~frustum~~ member spaced from the central ridge.

Claim 4 (original). The connector of claim 1 wherein the chemically inert material is a chemically inert polymer selected from the group consisting of polyethylenes, polypropylenes, polyamides, polyvinyls, polyesters and polyethers including mixtures and copolymers thereof.

Claim 5 (previously amended). The connector of claim 4 wherein the flat disk is circular for use when the rail is horizontal.

Claim 6 (previously amended). The connector of claim 5 wherein the flat disk is oval for use when the rail is inclined.

Claim 7 (previously amended). A railing system having a top rail and a bottom rail, the top rail and the bottom rail being spaced apart and formed of wood, the wood treated with a wood preservative, the railing system having painted hollow metal balusters extending between the top and bottom rails, the railing system having means for protecting the hollow metal baluster from the corrosive effects of the wood preservative, the protecting means being placed between the ends of the hollow metal balusters and the top and bottom rails.

Claim 8 (original). The railing system of claim 7 wherein the protecting means has means for joining the protecting means to the top and bottom rails.

Claim 9 (original). The railing system of claim 7 wherein the protecting means is formed from a chemically inert polymer selected from the group consisting of polyethylenes, polypropylenes, polyamides, polyvinyls, polyesters and polyethers including mixtures and copolymers thereof.

Claim 10 (original). A railing system having a top rail and a bottom rail, the top rail and the bottom rail being spaced apart and formed of wood, the wood treated with a wood preservative, the railing system having painted hollow metal balusters extending between the top and bottom rails, a plurality of connectors for use in isolating the tubular metal balusters from the rails, each connector formed of a chemically inert polymer and comprising a body and a disk,

said body having an upper frustum with a base and a lower frustum with a base, said upper and lower frustums joined at their bases with a central ridge formed about the body where the frustums are joined, said body adapted to conform and wedge into an end of one of the tubular metal balusters on at least the central ridge; and,

said disk adapted for placement under the lower frustum and against the end of the tubular metal baluster when the body is wedged into the end of tubular metal baluster,

said upper frustum having a central cavity for receipt of a fastener for joining the body and the disk to one of the wooden rails, said disk acting as a corrosion barrier between the baluster and the wood rail.

Claim 11 (original). The railing system of claim 10 wherein the connectors have one or more additional ridges formed on the upper frustum spaced above the central ridge.

Claim 12 (original). The railing system of claim 11 wherein the connectors have one or more additional ridges formed on the lower frustum spaced below the central ridge.

Claim 13 (original). The railing system of claim 12 wherein the connectors are formed from a chemically inert polymer selected from the group consisting of polyethylenes, polypropylenes, polyamides, polyvinyls, polyesters and polyethers including mixtures and copolymers thereof.

Claim 14 (original). The railing system of claim 10 wherein the disks of the connectors are circular for use when the top and bottom rails are horizontal.

Claim 15 (original). The railing system of claim 10 wherein the disks of the connectors are oval for use when the top and bottom rails are inclined.